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BULLETIN

OF

THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM

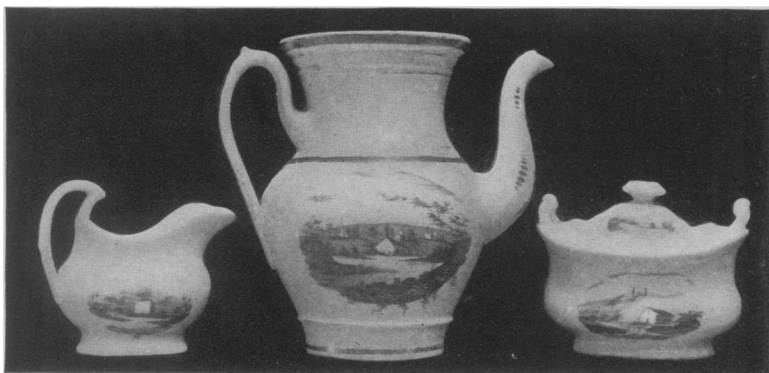
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THE TUCKER AND HEMPHILL HARD PORCELAIN MANUFACTORY, PHILADELPHIA 1825—1838

To William Ellis Tucker, of Philadelphia, belongs the honor of being the first to supply the home market with a purely American porcelain. The story of his remarkable life-work and the history of the factory which he established, the first important one of its kind on this side of the Atlantic, cannot fail to prove of especial interest to the ceramic student. Commencing his investiga-



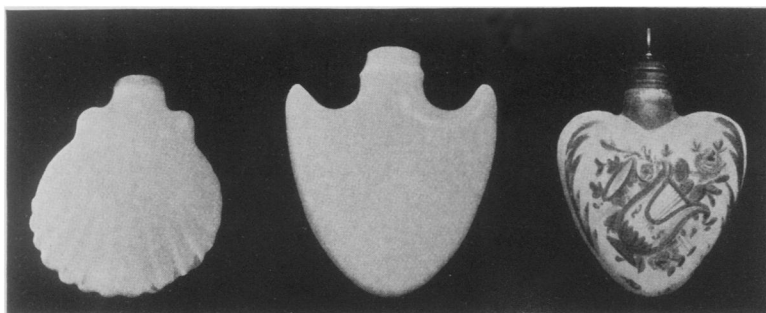
EARLY TUCKER WARE, 1825-1828
Painted in Sepia

tions with no previous knowledge of the composition of the ware, nor of the processes of its fabrication, he set resolutely to work to discover its hidden mysteries, and, wholly unaided by the practical experience of others, he succeeded in a few years in perfecting, from new and untried materials, a porcelain body equal in all respects to the best which was being produced in Europe. His body was neither that of the French potters nor the true bone of the English, but partook of the characteristics of both, the proportion of phosphate of lime, as shown by analysis, being about eight per cent., a very much smaller

percentage than in the English soft paste. While, therefore, the Tucker china cannot be classed as a soft porcelain, its specific gravity and thoroughly vitreous character would seem to fairly entitle it to be called a true hard paste porcelain, which it more nearly resembles. Indeed, fire-tests made by Prof. Isaac Broome, to whom we submitted specimens, show that the Tucker porcelain will stand a higher degree of heat than the Sèvres ware of the same period.

Strange as it may appear, but little has been published relative to this early venture, although seventy-five years ago Philadelphians justly prided themselves on their "China Factory," and were in the habit of taking strangers to visit it, as one of the principal points of interest in the city.

During the years 1816 to 1822, Benjamin Tucker, a member of the religious Society of Friends, had a china shop on the south side of Market (then called High) street, at No. 324, between Ninth and Tenth streets, Philadelphia, near where the new Post Office building now stands.* He built a small kiln in the



PERFUME VIALS, WHITE AND DECORATED

rear of his property for the use of his son, William Ellis Tucker, who was thus enabled to employ much of his time in painting on the imported white china and firing it in the kiln. These attempts at decoration were at first crude and unsatisfactory, but they served to arouse an interest in the subject, which soon led him to commence experimenting with different clays which he procured in the vicinity of the city. These investigations finally resulted in the production of a fair quality of opaque queensware. He then turned his attention to kaolin and feldspar, and, after repeated failures, he at length succeeded in discovering the proper proportions of these ingredients, with bone-dust and flint, necessary for the manufacture of a high grade of porcelain. The body thus obtained was translucent and of considerable hardness, density, and toughness, and capable of withstanding extreme changes of temperature. The glaze was perfectly adapted to the body and of excellent composition.

About the year 1825, Mr. Tucker first seriously attempted the manu-

*Some time previous to 1825, Benjamin Tucker, the father, retired from the china business and established a select academy at the southwest corner of Fifth and Mulberry streets, where for several years he was known as a prominent educator. He had been a teacher from 1799 to 1814, as the Philadelphia directories show.

facture of the ware as a business venture. The old water-works at the northwest corner of Schuylkill-Front (Twenty-third) and Chestnut streets were obtained from the city, in which the necessary kilns, etc. were erected. On October 23, 1826, he purchased four acres of land, on which a feldspar quarry was situated, from Alexander Dixon, of Newcastle County, Delaware.

Thomas Tucker, a younger brother, who was at a later date, as we shall see, associated with him in the business, prepared a historical sketch of this factory, which was read before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, on June 8, 1868. The following quotations from this paper will show some of the difficulties encountered in the manufacture of porcelain at that period:



VASE DECORATED
IN COLORS

COLOGNE BOTTLE
IN WHITE

PLATE, "SPIDER" DESIGN
IN GOLD

"He burned kiln after kiln with very poor success. The glazing would crack, and the body would blister; and, besides, we discovered that we had a man who placed the ware in the kiln who was employed by some interested parties in England to impede our success.

"Most of the handles were found in the bottom of the seggars after the kiln was burned. We could not account for it, until a deaf-and-dumb man in our employment detected him running his knife around each handle as he placed them in the kiln.

"At another time, every piece of china had to be broken before it could be taken out of the seggar. We always washed the round O's, the article in which the china was placed in the kiln, with silex; but this man had washed them with feldspar, which of course melted, and fastened every article to the bottom. But William discharged him, and we got over that difficulty."

In 1828 Thomas Tucker commenced to learn the different branches of the business. During the same year, Thomas Hulme, of Philadelphia, invested some money in the enterprise and was admitted to partnership, as appears by



TUCKER AND HEMPHILL PORCELAIN
Made in Philadelphia, 1828-1835

the mark found on a number of pieces made that year, being printed in red, beneath the glaze, "Tucker & Hulme, China Manufacturers, Philadelphia, 1828." This partnership, however, does not seem to have continued for more than a year or so.

On the 22nd of August, 1832, William Ellis Tucker died, but previous to that date Judge Joseph Hemphill, of Philadelphia, had been admitted as a partner in the business. The latter had recently returned from a trip to Europe, where he had become deeply interested in the manufacture of porcelain. Messrs. Tucker and Hemphill purchased the property at the southwest corner of Schuylkill-Sixth (Seventeenth) and Chestnut streets, where they erected a large factory, storehouse, and three kilns, and greatly increased the producing capacity of the works.

After the death of the founder, Thomas Tucker continued to superintend the business, which was carried on in the name of Joseph Hemphill, who associated with him his son, the late Robert Coleman Hemphill, of West Chester, Pa.

The porcelain works continued with varying success for several years. By an Act of Assembly dated April 15th, 1835, an American Porcelain Company was incorporated, consisting of Eastern gentlemen, to whom Judge Hemphill sold his interest. Whether this company ever operated the works does not fully appear, but it would seem doubtful, as Judge Hemphill made an exhibit of ware at the Franklin Institute in 1836. It is said that the company, being unfortunate in other enterprises, was not able to give the porcelain manufacture proper attention.

On October 1, 1837, after the retirement of Judge Hemphill, the factory was leased for a term of six months by Thomas Tucker, who purchased all of the unburned ware then on hand, with the other materials and fixtures, as appears in an article of agreement signed by John Rynex, at Boston, who seems to have acquired the property, or acted in the capacity of agent. The new proprietor continued the manufacture of fine porcelain for about a year, until he had filled a store, which he had taken on Chestnut street, above Seventh, with the ware. He then discontinued the making of porcelain, and engaged in the business of importing china from Europe. In the latter part of 1841 he sold out his entire stock at his store, 100 Chestnut street, through C. C. Mackey, auctioneer. Mr. Tucker afterwards engaged in the cotton business, and died in Philadelphia in July, 1890.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WARE

The products of this factory may be divided into three periods, as follows:

- 1st. The Tucker period, from 1825 to 1828.
- 2nd. The Tucker & Hulme period, covering the year 1828.
- 3rd. The Tucker & Hemphill period, from 1832 to 1838.

First Period

The productions of the early W. E. Tucker period are now scarce. The paste is yellowish, showing a greater percentage of bone than in the later ware. The only attempts at ornamentation were crude and inartistic. Simple land-

scapes, butterflies and the like were painted roughly, always over the glaze, in sepia or brown monochrome. The former were all of the same general character, a house, with lake in the foreground and mountains in the distance, produced by a few sweeps of the brush, but no two exactly alike in details. The decoration was always done by hand, the printing or transfer process apparently never having been employed at any period at these works. A considerable amount of ware was sold in an undecorated condition which was generally warped, twisted and blistered, showing that the manufacture was at that time largely in the experimental stage. The shapes produced were principally original in design and not taken from the French wares, as was the case at a later date. Gold was used in the decoration to only a limited extent, the sepia landscapes being as a rule the only ornamentation attempted. A few examples of gilded ware were produced in a tentative way, but the gold was of inferior quality and rather thinly applied.

Numerous examples of this period in the Museum collection show the influence of the English potters in the shapes of coffee pots, tea pots and cups and saucers, while other pieces are entirely original in design.

Second Period

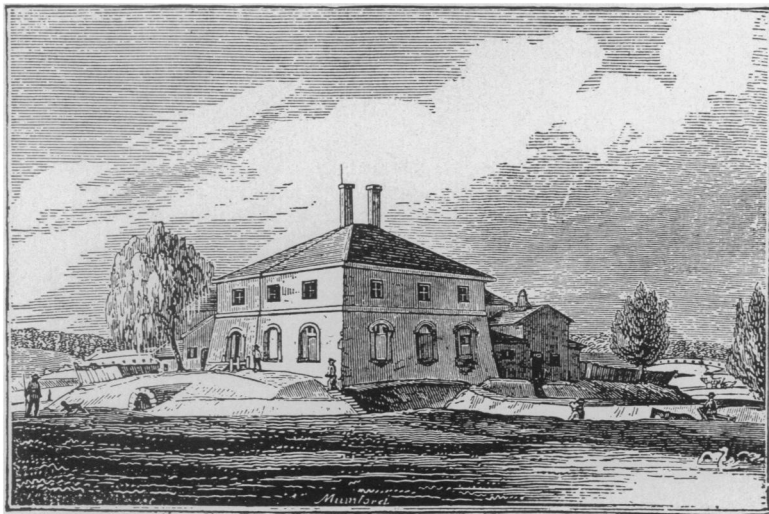
During the year 1828, when Thomas Hulme was connected with the works, considerable improvement was made in the decoration of the ware. The rough, brown daubs, intended for embellishment, gave place to overglaze paintings of sprays or groups of flowers, usually without the addition of gold, although a limited amount of the ware was finished in white and gold. A pitcher, in the Museum collection, is decorated only with gold bands and the initials C. B., having been made for Charles Burd. It bears the mark of Tucker and Hulme, with the date, 1828, in red.

After the retirement of Mr. Hulme, at the end of about a year, William Ellis Tucker appears to have continued the manufacture alone, until the year 1832, but the quality of the ware and the character of the decoration remained practically unchanged. Roses and bouquets of flowers or figures of birds were usually the subjects chosen by the painters and gold was used but sparingly.

Third Period

Soon after the business passed into the hands of Judge Hemphill, artists and artisans were brought over from France, England and Germany, and a more pretentious style of decoration was introduced, although for a while the sepia landscapes continued to be used, in combination with gold. The French methods of ornamentation came much into vogue about this time. The ware was sold very extensively to the well-to-do people in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and nearly every family of prominence or wealth had table services or pieces made to order and decorated with initials, monograms, medallions, or armorial bearings, usually enclosed in wreaths of flowers or gold tracery. Compact bands and festoons of exquisitely painted flowers, in which the rose, tulip, and forget-me-not were generally prominent, encircled many of the finer pieces. Some of the vases and pitchers and many of the table pieces were close copies of Sevres forms, and some of the ware, sold at the present time for French

work by ignorant bric-a-brac dealers, was made in Philadelphia between 1833 and 1838. Excellent portraits of prominent men were painted on some of the larger pieces, an example of the latter being still preserved in a pitcher owned by Hon. William Wayne, of Paoli, Pa., which is embellished on one side with a view of the historic monument at Paoli, and on the other with a colored likeness of Major General Anthony Wayne, copied from an oil portrait by Charles Wilson Peale. This interesting piece is one of a pair made for Colonel Isaac Wayne, son of General "Mad Anthony," and is marked on the bottom, in red, "Manufactured by Jos. Hemphill, Phila." A similar example, in the Pennsylvania Museum, is a pitcher containing a tinted portrait of General Washington which is evidently a copy of one of William Birch's enamels after Stuart's first picture, known as the Vaughan portrait, now in the possession of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, of Philadelphia. Mr. Ferdinand J. Dreer, of Philadelphia, also owns a porcelain vase on which is a painting of Napoleon at the burning of Moscow, which his father purchased at the factory in 1833.



WATER WORKS, SCHUYLKILL—FRONT AND CHESTNUT, PHILADELPHIA
Used as a China Factory in 1825

The ware of this best period is very similar to the French porcelain of the same period, but has a bluer tint. Sometimes the glaze, where it has accumulated in grooves, has a pronounced blue color.

The Museum possesses the largest collection of Tucker and Hemphill porcelain in existence, with the original pattern books of the factory, showing in black and white, and in colors, every shape and pattern produced.

Much of this ware is owned by old Philadelphia families and it is to be hoped that many of the best pieces will eventually be added to the Museum collection for permanent preservation.

EDWIN A. BARBER.